



# TALKING WITH REPORTERS

The best way to get nurses' messages into the news, of course, is by talking to journalists.

When reporters talk to you about a story they're working on, they call this "*doing an interview.*"

It's important for us to remember this when we're talking to reporters about stories they're working on. No matter how casual the conversation may seem, *you're being interviewed!*

This is because when a journalist is working, they are listening carefully to what you say and thinking about where it might fit into the story.

This isn't an argument for not speaking with journalists – but it is important to remember what the journalist is doing, and to speak carefully as you would *for the record*, not as if just chatting with a friend.

Indeed, it's good advice to treat *everything* you say as *on the record* – that is, only say things that you can live with if they appear in a newspaper or on the air.

What's more, giving an interview is no guarantee that the reporter will cover the story the way you think they should. But if they don't – don't get mad! *Get better!* Think about how to do better next time, and what you can learn from your experiences.

Remember that while reporters have their agendas, you have yours too – and there's nothing wrong with sticking to it.

Think about what you want to say in advance. Don't get flustered if a reporter asks a question to which you don't know the answer – just say you'll look into it. Turn *their* questions back to *your* key points.

## Tips for being interviewed

**SET GOALS FOR EVERY INTERVIEW** – think about your key messages, stay on message and practice likely answers in advance

**YOU'RE THE EXPERT WHEN IT COMES TO NURSING** – speak with the confidence you're entitled to!

**THINK ABOUT YOUR MAIN POINTS IN ADVANCE** – come back to them when you're talking

**RETURN CALLS QUICKLY** – remember, reporters only have a couple of hours to finish their stories, and if we won't talk to them, someone else will

**IF YOU DON'T KNOW AN ANSWER, SAY SO** – don't fudge!

**NEVER SAY "NO COMMENT"** – that's only for the movies

**OFF THE RECORD?** – anything you say to a journalist should be treated as if it's on the record

**STAY COOL** – if a reporter annoys you, restate your points and don't get so mad you say something foolish

**IF YOU NEED TIME, ASK FOR IT**  
– contact UNA's Communications Department before calling back

**GIVE YOUR STORY THE HUMAN TOUCH**  
– do this by speaking about your personal experience, but be careful not to divulge information you're not entitled to discuss

**AVOID NURSING JARGON AND ACRONYMS** – ordinary readers and viewers won't understand

**AVOID SARCASM** – it seldom comes across clearly

**STOP WHEN YOU'VE SAID ENOUGH** – don't fall for the silent treatment, it's an effective technique to get interview subjects to babble. When you've made your point, wait for the reporter to ask another question

**YOU CAN ASK QUESTIONS TOO** – and buy some time to think about your responses

**BE CAREFUL AFTER THE INTERVIEW**  
– the interview is never over, even if you're "just chatting"

**DON'T BE INTIMIDATED BY "SCRUMS"**  
– crowds of reporters shoving microphones in your face. Stay calm. It helps to focus on one microphone

**BE CAREFUL ON THE PHONE** – when you're speaking to a media reporter on the telephone, always assume you're being taped

## Some suggested responses...

A confident, friendly tone will take you a long way with most media interviewers.

What's more, no matter what you've seen on American TV, most television reporters don't want to make you look bad when they interview for their news shows. Indeed, their employers' advertising revenue depends on the notion that they usually interview credible people who know what they're talking about.

This is why most news reporters will give you a second chance if you feel your response to a particular question wasn't as good as you would have liked it to be.

That said, sometimes on controversial stories, reporters will try to put words in your mouth, or press you to give answers you're not comfortable with. These are times when it's a good idea to stick to your key messages.

Here are some examples of difficult questions some reporters might ask, and calm, friendly responses that can get you off the hook...

### WHEN YOU'RE ASKED TO SPEAK FOR OTHERS:

*Why do you think the minister of health decided to do that?*

*"You'd have to ask him about that."*

*"I wouldn't know, but I suspect that..."*

### YOU KNOW THE ANSWER, BUT THE INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL:

*How many patients were affected?*

*"I'm not allowed to disclose any information that might affect patients..."*

*"I'm afraid privacy legislation prevents me from discussing that."*

## YOU GET AN EMOTIONALLY LOADED QUESTION:

*Doesn't this amount to holding your patients hostage?*

*"We are very concerned about our patients, which is why we feel we have to do this..."*

*"Not at all – that's why we're providing emergency services."*

*"You should ask the employer about that – they're acting as the roadblock here."*

## YOU FEEL BOXED IN:

*Are you going to return to work, or be found in contempt of court?*

*"We'll be returning to work as soon as we can, as soon as we reach a fair settlement."*

*Are the nurses to blame for what happened, or the hospital?*

*"Right now we're trying to find out exactly what happened."*

## A REPORTER TOSSES YOU A HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION:

*If you don't reach a deal will you be going on strike?*

*"We're very confident we can reach a fair agreement in negotiations. Getting a deal is our priority here."*

*No one expects a deal to be reached by your deadline – what will happen if one isn't?*

*"You're asking me to speculate. We have every reason to believe a deal will be reached."*

## YOU KEEP GETTING THE SAME QUESTION AGAIN AND AGAIN:

*"As I mentioned earlier..."*

When reporters frequently ask the same question over and over again, sometimes they're hoping you'll blurt out something dramatic, and other times they're just trying to help you ace your key-message sound bite.

Remember: Don't get mad, sound reasonable and repeat your key message.

If you must, politely signal that you're not going to waver.

And remember, there are no off-the-record moments after an interview. Assume the camera or the tape recorder is still running.

## Bridging...

A key technique for successful interviews is known as "bridging."

That is, managing the transition from whatever it is the reporter wants to talk about to whatever it is that you want to talk about.

If you've thought about and practiced your key messages, bridging to them from wherever the interview has gone is a great way to regain control of an interview that seems to be getting away on you.

## FIRST ANSWER THE REPORTER'S QUESTION, THEN TRANSITION TO YOUR MESSAGE...

*"Before we finish with this topic, there's one thing I'd like to add..."*

*"However, it's important to remember that..."*

*"Let me put this in perspective for you..."*

**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact  
UNA's Communications Department at 1-800-252-9394.**